

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

10 MAY 1979

OLC 79-0871/b

Honorable Lloyd Bentsen
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bentsen:

This is in response to your request for an assessment of the damage caused by unauthorized disclosures of the identities of persons engaged or assisting in foreign intelligence activities.

Unauthorized disclosures of sensitive information concerning CIA personnel, sources and methods, and intelligence activities have damaged the Agency's ability to perform its assigned mission. Among the most damaging disclosures, totally devoid of any redeeming social value, have been those identifying CIA personnel whose affiliation with the Agency is not publicly acknowledged.

The unauthorized disclosure of the identities of CIA officers has had an adverse impact on the effectiveness of our intelligence activities and on the professional effectiveness and morale of our personnel. The safety and well-being of our officers and their families have also been jeopardized. Such disclosures have damaged the nation's credibility in its relationships with essential foreign sources of intelligence, who are appalled by the seeming inability of our country to keep a secret and who believe their own lives and liberty are imperiled. Current law has proven to be inadequate in deterring these unauthorized disclosures, and they continue to be made with virtual impunity. The net result is a damaged intelligence capability and reduced national security.

Unauthorized disclosures of intelligence officer identities have been extensive; most have been made by former CIA employees who are avowedly determined to destroy the Agency by exposing those who serve their country, often at great peril and personal sacrifice, in the clandestine corps. Leading the list is Phillip Agee who to date has published the names of some 1200 alleged CIA personnel. At a recent World Youth Festival in Havana, Agee escalated his personal vendetta against the CIA to a declaration of open war by reaffirming to the world his intention of fighting the CIA by continuing to expose its personnel and operations. Towards this end he has published a new book entitled Dirty Work: The CIA in Western Europe. The book contains instructions on how to identify and expose CIA personnel and operations and is promoted as identifying over 700 CIA personnel in Europe alone. Agee has also launched publication of "Covert Action Information Bulletin," which he, along with others, plans to publish bimonthly with the hope that the publication will become "a permanent weapon in the fight against the CIA, the FBI, military intelligence, and all other instruments of U.S. imperialist oppression throughout the world." Mr. Agee has stated that he intends to organize a worldwide network of "agents," called "CIA Watch," to expose CIA personnel and methods of operation. That such disclosures are made with relative impunity and commercial success must certainly encourage the continuation and expansion of this destructive activity.

Security considerations preclude our confirming or denying specific instances of purported identification of CIA personnel. Suffice it to say that a substantial number of these allegations have been accurate. The destructive effects of these disclosures have been varied and wide-ranging.

CIA's relations with foreign sources of intelligence have been impaired. Sources have evinced increased concern for their own safety. Some active sources and individuals contemplating cooperation with the United States have terminated or reduced their contact with us. Sources have questioned how the U.S. Government could expect foreigners to provide information in view of continuing disclosures

of information that jeopardized their careers, liberty and lives.

Nearly all major foreign intelligence services with which we have liaison relationships have undertaken reviews of their relations with the Agency. Some immediately ascertainable results of continuing disclosures include reduction of contact and reduced passage of information. In taking these actions, several liaison services have explicitly cited disclosures by former CIA employees.

We are increasingly being asked to explain how we can guarantee the safety of individuals who cooperate with us when we cannot protect our own officers from exposure. Since many of our most valuable intelligence sources live in societies where anything less than total allegiance to the state could subject an individual to loss of life or liberty, they rightfully demand absolute assurance that their cooperative relationship with us will remain sacrosanct. You can imagine the chilling effect it must have on a source who one day discovers that the individual with whom he has been in contact has been openly identified as a CIA officer. The impact in this regard is twofold: first, there is a substantial adverse impact on the Agency's ability to collect intelligence; secondly, some of our foreign sources who must remain in place despite the disclosure may be subject to severe sanctions.

Unauthorized disclosures of intelligence officer identities are responsible for reducing the effectiveness of intelligence personnel and operations. CIA operations officers identified through unauthorized disclosures by former colleagues are as severely compromised as those identified by hostile foreign services.

The professional effectiveness of officers so compromised is substantially and sometimes irreparably damaged. They must reduce or break contact with sensitive covert sources. Continued contact must be coupled with increased defensive measures that are inevitably more costly and time-consuming. Some CIA officers must be removed from their assignments and returned from overseas at substantial cost. Years of irreplaceable area experience and linguistic

skill are lost. Reassignment mobility of the compromised officer is impaired. As a result, the pool of experienced CIA officers is being reduced. Such losses are deeply felt in view of the fact that, in comparison with the intelligence services of our adversaries, we are not a large organization.

Replacement of officers thus compromised is difficult and, in some cases, impossible. In small U.S. installations abroad, the position formerly filled by the compromised officer is itself compromised. The career implications of such a compromise, especially when it occurs early in the officer's career, are severe not only to the individual but also to the Agency, whose ability to recruit qualified personnel for operational assignments is impaired.

In addition, not only do such disclosures bespeak of guilt by association with regard to the CIA officer's active contacts, but once the officer's identity is disclosed counterintelligence analysis by adversary services allows the careers of identified officers to be traced through previous assignments producing an expanded pattern of compromise through association. Such disclosures also sensitize hostile security services and foreign populations to CIA presence, making our job far more difficult.

Finally, such disclosures place CIA personnel in increased danger. Given the presence of terrorist or violence-prone organizations in many countries, CIA officers publicly identified are subject to harassment and substantial danger of injury or death. Perhaps most insidious is the effect of disclosure on intelligence officers' families. Phillip Agee's book Dirty Work lists the overseas addresses of alleged intelligence officers as well as the names of their wives, making the latter potential targets in their own right.

There is a pressing need for effective legislation to discourage these unauthorized disclosures. The credibility of our country in its relationships with foreign liaison services and agent sources, the personal safety and well-being of patriotic Americans serving their country, and the professional effectiveness and morale of our country's intelligence officers are all at stake.

As matters now stand the intentional exposure of covert intelligence personnel with impunity implies a governmental position of neutrality in the matter. It suggests that U.S. intelligence officers are "fair game" for those members of their own society who take issue with the existence of CIA or find other motives for making these unauthorized disclosures. Specific statutory prohibition of such action is critical to the maintenance of an effective foreign intelligence service. It is imperative that a message be sent that the unauthorized disclosure of the identities of intelligence officers is intolerable.

We have, of course, discussed the problem of unauthorized disclosures of intelligence officer identities with the Intelligence Oversight Committees. The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence are supportive and appear to be in basic agreement with the need for remedial legislation. The Department of Justice has been studying the problem in the context of a comprehensive approach to broader questions concerning "leaks" of classified information. I continue to believe that identities legislation is urgently needed. I sincerely appreciate your genuine concern about our intelligence capabilities and wholeheartedly support your efforts to call attention to and deal with this serious problem.

Yours sincerely,

SIGNED

STANSFIELD TURNER